

How EMDR therapists' thoughts, emotions, beliefs and behaviors impact EMDR therapy. Analyzing action systems to understand therapists' clinical choices.

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We, EMDR therapists, are human beings with our strengths and weaknesses. In our work with trauma patients, we are in first line to witness and feel the difficult and sometimes horrific events our clients have survived. How does it affect our work and our technical choices ? Technical choices made by the therapist in EMDR therapy are also influenced by the therapists' own psychological schema, their personal life experiences, their values, their personality traits, etc. These individual subjective factors can be assessed in different ways. Noticing our own emotions, thoughts, beliefs and behaviors during EMDR sessions can help us become aware of underlying schema influencing our work. The concept of action systems and sub-systems (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006) can also be useful for noticing and analyzing the therapist's actions, reactions and interventions during EMDR sessions, offering a structured manner to analyze countertransference. Action systems are defined as "psychobiological systems that make up personality" and involve specific "innate propensities to act in a goal directed manner." The first category of action system implies approaching attractive stimuli and dealing with daily life: i.e. nutrition, exploration, reproduction, care-giving, social engagement, social ranking, cooperation. The second category of action system implies the avoidance of adverse stimuli and coping with threat and danger, with such action sub-systems as hyper-vigilance, fight, flight, freeze and submission. By observing their own

behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and sensorimotor actions, EMDR clinicians can assess which action sub-systems are activated while working with their clients. EMDR is defined as a client centered approach, therefore, the sub-systems of social engagement and cooperation should have priority in EMDR psychotherapy, but this is not always easy to achieve.

In this workshop we will present videos excerpts of EMDR sessions and participants will be asked to imagine that they are working with these clients. Then participants will be offered the possibility to assess their own action sub-systems which are activated while watching these videos. We will analyze to which extent the activated action sub-systems may impact their choices of interventions: stabilization versus trauma processing, choice of target, choice of interweave, support during the set of bilateral stimulations, etc.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Participants will be able to:

1. Analyze their own action systems while working in EMDR.
2. Understand how their action systems may impact their clinical choices.
3. Adjust their action systems to better fit the needs of the clients.

This presentation addresses an often forgotten issue in EMDR therapy: the subjectivity of clinical choices made in EMDR therapy, and how subjective issues and schema on the side of the EMDR clinician may affect the EMDR therapy and its outcome.